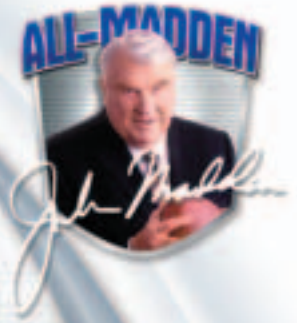


PRIMA'S OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE

PLAYMAKER CONTROL TIPS



EA
SPORTS™

MADDEN

NFL 2004

The background of the cover features a large image of a football player in a white Atlanta Falcons uniform with the number 7. He is wearing a black helmet and holding a red football in his left hand. The EA Sports Madden 2004 logo is overlaid on the center of the image.

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PLAYERS INC.

This game has received the following rating from the ESRB

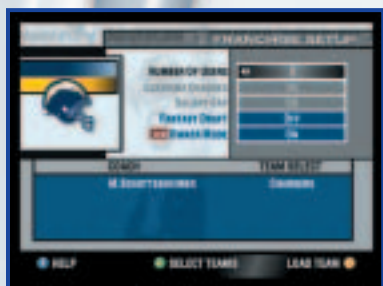


FRANCHISE MODE

Franchise mode is back in *Madden NFL 2004*, but as you've come to expect over the years, there are a few new wrinkles. This year's game adds Owner mode. Turn it on in the Franchise Setup screen, and you get to handle the business side of owning a professional football team. No, we're not just talking about player contracts and free agent signings. You have to manage your bank account like a real owner, by monitoring ticket prices, special events, coaches' salaries, concessions, and much more. Watch your pennies, and you'll have cash for signing bonuses, contract extensions, and eventually, a new stadium.

In this chapter, we take you through Franchise mode, from the start of your franchise, all the way through training camp, preseason, regular schedule, playoffs (you hope) and finally to the college draft. Then, it's back to the drawing board, as you prepare for another season. It's a long haul from doormat to dynasty, and we'll show you how to make your football dreams come true in 30 years or less!

Setting Up a Franchise



The first step in creating a franchise is to select the options that govern the league. You can set any number of Users (Owners) from 1 to 32. If you activate Owner mode, the Coaching Changes and Salary Cap options are automatically activated. As team owner, you no longer have control over the decision to fire you (too bad), or the amount of your team salary cap. If you turn on Fantasy Draft, every player in the game is released into a pool, and you take part in an original draft with 31 other user- or CPU-controlled teams. Find more on this in the Fantasy Draft section below. Finally, you select a coach and the associated team/playbook.

Note

When Fantasy Draft is turned on, you go immediately to the draft screen. If you opt to turn Fantasy Draft off, you begin with the actual roster of the team you selected.

Fantasy Draft

Now, it's time to draft our team. Our franchise is based on the Chargers, so we pick 22nd (determined by the CPU). The CPU handles the first 21 picks, and we're on the clock in round #1 (of 49). The Fantasy Draft screen includes 24 sortable ratings columns, so we can arrange the players to suit our priorities.



Draft Day Strategies

You can arrive at the Fantasy Draft without a plan or a clue, and you might even end up with a competitive team. But, thanks to the almighty salary cap, you need a financial plan or you will end up out of money and out of quality players before the last round. Here are some thoughts on planning your draft strategies.

- ▶ *The game decides when a player hangs up his spikes. Keep in mind, the 38-year-old star you draft today may retire at the end of the year.*
- ▶ *Do you sacrifice the future to buy a winning team on draft day? If you spend every dime, there will be no money left to sign college draft picks before the beginning of next season.*
- ▶ *Be careful about drafting an older player with a fat, long-term contract. His Overall Rating will probably erode over the next few years, and if you are forced to release him for a better player, you are stuck paying out the remainder of the contract.*
- ▶ *You should also keep some money on hand for signing free agents and handing out signing bonuses. It's a jungle out there, and he (or she) with the most coconuts gets to play the game longest.*

Note

It's difficult to decide how much money to devote to each position. The following list ranks the highest paid salaries by position during the 2002 NFL season (the salary in parentheses represents an actual salary paid to a position player in 2002). Obviously, you cannot afford to pay these salaries across the board. In fact, if you duplicated the salaries displayed below, you would use up the entire team salary cap of \$75 million for just 11 players! However, this list gives you an idea of how NFL teams value each position. So, if you are about to sign a punter for \$5,000,000, you may want to reconsider.

1. Defensive End (\$11,478,285)
2. Quarterback (\$10,331,333)
3. Running Back (\$10,306,600)
4. Cornerback (\$9,079,843)
5. Offensive Lineman (\$7,549,998)
6. Defensive Tackle (\$6,980,000)
7. Linebacker (\$6,258,333)
8. Wide Receiver (\$6,061,235)
9. Tight End (\$3,897,000)
10. Safety (\$3,300,000)
11. Punter/Kicker (\$1,916,666)

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10

We decide to draft a quarterback in the first round, picking Tom Brady (the author's Michigan roots are too strong to overcome). After confirming our selection, the CPU handles the remaining teams, and a recap screen lists every player taken in the first round. Interestingly, Brady is only the 6th quarterback selected in the first 22 picks.

We have the 11th pick in round two, and we select LaDainian Tomlinson. Other offensive stars are being taken, but it's obvious that many teams in the league are more concerned about building a strong defense or offensive line.

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
11	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
11	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
12	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
13	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
14	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
15	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
16	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
17	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
18	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
19	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
20	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
21	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
22	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10

It's back to the 22nd pick in round three, and we focus on the offensive line. Counting our dollars, we select Damien Woody, a young center from New England. We note with interest that 7 of the first 10 players taken in the third round are defensive players.

Shifting to defense, we select left end Eric Hicks, a "steal" at \$650,000. Defensive selections continue to dominate the draft, so we decide to stay on the other side of the ball and select middle linebacker London Fletcher in round five.

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
11	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
12	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
13	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
14	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
15	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
16	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
17	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
18	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
19	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
20	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
21	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
22	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
23	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10

Note

As the draft progresses, the game tracks your selections, by position, with a few exceptions. OT (offensive tackles), OG (offensive guards), DE (defensive ends), DT (defensive tackles), and OLB (outside linebackers), are grouped together, rather than tracked by LG, RG, RE, LE, and so on. However, each player's actual position is noted on the screen.

The thought of L.T. running behind a wall of papier-mâché has us very worried, so we devote rounds 6 and 7 to the offensive line, drafting right tackle John Tait and left guard Edwin Mulitalo.

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
11	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
12	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
13	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
14	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
15	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
16	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
17	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
18	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
19	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
20	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
21	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
22	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
23	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
24	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10

Note

One of the more challenging aspects of the Fantasy Draft is the Current Pick Cap, which limits who you can select in a given round. The Current Pick Cap changes, depending on how much you spend from round to round, so it's a good idea to watch your spending. If you take the top-rated player available (they are often the most expensive) in each of the first several rounds, you are likely to be strapped for cash while still trying to fill important roster spots. So, think value for your dollar, especially during the first 10 rounds.

Before making our eighth round selection, we review our draft picks. We still have not selected a receiver, but the offensive line is still a concern, so we look for a left tackle. The Steelers' Marvel Smith is young, talented, and under a million dollars.

PICK	PLAYER	TEAM	ACT	VAL
1	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
2	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
3	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
4	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
5	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
6	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
7	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
8	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
9	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
10	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
11	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
12	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
13	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
14	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
15	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
16	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
17	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
18	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
19	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
20	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
21	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
22	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
23	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
24	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
25	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
26	Tom Brady	NE	QB	10
27	LaDainian Tomlinson	NE	RB	10
28	Eric Hicks	NE	DE	10
29	London Fletcher	NE	LB	10
30	Damien Woody	NE	OG	10
31	John Tait	NE	RT	10

TIP

It's easy to get wrapped up with skill ratings such as Speed, Awareness, Catching, etc., as you peruse the draft lists. However, don't overlook the INJ rating. All the talent in the world won't do you any good if your player is on injured reserve for most of the season.

We jump back to offense with round 9, selecting speedy Corey Bradford, and then back to defense for Eagles right end Ndukwe Kalu in round 10.



Draft Priority List

The following Draft Priority List will help you draft an entire starting team with your first 25 picks. With your core in place, concentrate on wide receivers and interior line backups (offense and defense) with your next several picks. After that, it's best player available as you select backups for every position. Use reserve wide receivers as punt and kick returners.

1. Quarterback: The leader of the offense
2. Halfback: We value Speed, Awareness, Acceleration, and Breaking Tackles
3. Center: Strength up the middle—it works for baseball and football
4. Defensive End: An unstoppable pass rusher and run stuffer
5. Middle Linebacker: An anchor for our run and pass defense
6. Offensive Tackle: Our star quarterback needs protection, and our future running back needs a few holes to run through
7. Offensive Guard: Strength, pass blocking, run blocking, and a little speed for pulling
8. Offensive Tackle: A strong tandem is critical
9. Wide Receiver: Speed, Acceleration, and Catching ability are the keys
10. Defensive End: Another quick, strong defender who hates quarterbacks
11. Cornerback: A good cover man with enough speed to play man defense
12. Outside Linebacker: Speed, Strength, Awareness, and Tackling ability
13. Defensive Tackle: An immovable object for the defensive front; we also like at least one strong pass rusher (Speed, Awareness, Tackling) at tackle
14. Strong Safety: A run stopper who can blitz and intimidate receivers over the middle
15. Wide Receiver: Another great pair of hands for the defense to worry about
16. Outside Linebacker: Defense wins championships, and this pick rounds our trio
17. Tight End: Run blocking is important, but we want our tight end to catch the ball. Speed here is a bonus
18. Cornerback: It takes two. If our first cornerback has blazing speed, we look for run stopping ability here
19. Free Safety: A ball hawk with speed to play center field
20. Offensive Guard: With studs at the tackles and one outstanding guard, an average quality #2 guard is okay.
21. Fullback: Run blocking and the ability to catch an occasional pass
22. Halfback: A good backup is critical over a long season
23. Kicker: Obviously, we are more interested in scoring touchdowns than kicking field goals
24. Punter: Controller technique is more important than punter ratings
25. Cornerback: Speed, Awareness, and Catching ability for the extra defensive back



As you move into the latter stages of the draft, check the Breakdown screen to see which roster spots need filling. The draft will not let you take more than what you need for a position, until the required number of players is drafted. However, it is important to track the distribution of players or you may end up with poor quality at positions that have been overlooked.

The Draft Continues

Using our priority list, we move through the next 39 rounds of the draft. With an eye toward our bankbook, we complete the draft with just over \$17 million left under the salary cap. We certainly could have spent more money, especially during the early rounds. But, the idea of building our team through the draft is more exciting. And, with cash on hand, we can sign a free agent to replace an injured player. Here is a look at our roster, by position.

ROSTER

Player	Position	Overall Rating	Age	Player	Position	Overall Rating	Age	Player	Position	Overall Rating	Age
Tom Brady	QB	90	26	Jeremy McKinney	LT	59	27	Keith Mitchell	LOLB	66	29
Chris Redman	QB	75	26	Edwin Mulitalo	LG	88	28	London Fletcher	MLB	89	28
Ray Lucas	QB	65	31	Matt Campbell	LG	72	31	Mike Maslowski	MLB	79	29
LaDainian Tomlinson	HB	95	24	Ryan Schau	LG	63	27	Zeke Moreno	ROLB	70	24
Jamel White	HB	79	26	Damien Woody	C	90	25	Don Davis	ROLB	68	30
Chris Fuamatu-Ma'afala	HB	72	26	Cory Raymer	C	76	30	Jerry Azumah	CB	79	24
Dan Kreider	FB	77	26	Tony Semple	RG	75	32	Terry Cousin	CB	77	28
Kevin Johnson	WR	83	28	John Tait	RT	87	28	Dale Carter	CB	77	33
Corey Bradford	WR	80	27	Eric Hicks	LE	86	27	Tod McBride	CB	66	27
James Thrash	WR	79	28	Willie Whitehead	LE	67	30	Jason Bostic	CB	65	27
Terry Glenn	WR	79	29	Ndukwe Kalu	RE	81	28	Keion Carpenter	FS	77	25
Isaac Byrd	WR	70	28	James Hall	RE	68	26	Brent Alexander	FS	74	32
Jeremy Shockey	TE	92	23	Cornelius Griffin	DT	86	26	Reggie Tongue	SS	85	30
Pete Mitchell	DT	73	31	John Thornton	DT	82	26	Jay Bellamy	SS	70	31
Jason Dunn	TE	57	29	Larry Smith	DT	75	28	Todd Peterson	K	66	33
Marvel Smith	LT	84	25	Mike Vrabel	LOLB	80	28	Bill LaFleur	P	73	27

Training Camp

New to *Madden NFL 2004* is Training Camp. Here, you can hone your playing skills, while at the same time earning attribute points for the players who complete their training successfully. There is a limit of one player per drill, and the same player cannot compete in more than one drill. However, after completing a drill successfully, you can double your points by repeating the drill at a higher skill level. The attribute awards are based on the level of trophy that you earn (three levels). The following sections give you overviews of all nine training events, with tips on improving your skills.



Note

Training Camp is not mandatory. You can skip it and move on to Preseason.

Pocket Presence

This is one of the toughest drills. Your job is to avoid being hit by the yellow tennis balls firing at you from the four ball machines set up around your "pocket." While avoiding the balls, which simulate sacks, you must throw the ball to one of the targets as the appropriate letter flashes on the screen. And, you cannot leave the pocket, or your throw will be discounted. Here are some important tips for improving your performance.



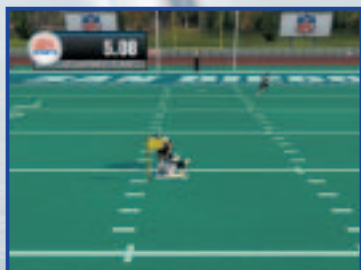
- Don't jump around in the pocket. Wait until a "sack" ball is fired at you, move out of its path, and then throw the ball to the target.
- Each target does not keep the same letter for an entire session, so don't get locked into "A" being in one spot, or you'll lose your rhythm.
- Above all, don't get happy feet. Avoiding the balls is not as difficult as it looks. Make short quick movements, set your feet, and throw.

Swat Ball



This is another tough camp, but you need these skills to roam the defensive secondary with confidence. With the clock ticking, you must run to three different stations (one is active at a time) to knock down or intercept a pass. Success here depends on three factors. First, get to the designated location quickly. This means put your head down and run as fast as you can. Second, after you arrive, square your body to the ball to improve your chances of swatting or intercepting the pass. Third, time your leap or swat movement so you don't miss the pass. To improve your chances of intercepting the pass, position yourself in front of the barrier, but not too close.

Trench Fight



The Trench Fight camp teaches you how to spin, rip, and shove your way past offensive linemen. Your job is to capture all three flags in a limited amount of time. At most, you have 13 seconds to capture the flags.

Clutch Kicking



The Clutch Kicking drill is relatively easy. Just keep kicking field goals until you rack up enough points for a trophy. As you advance through the levels, you have to contend with strong winds, and of course, the kicking meter moves much faster. But, for now, relax, stretch out your leg and knock it through the uprights.

Note

A punter or kicker can compete in either of the kicking drills to improve his skills.

Corner Punt



The punting drill teaches you to bury a punt inside the 20-yard line, without having it roll into the end zone for a touchback. Ideally, your kick should hit and go out of bounds inside the 20. A semicircular bull's-eye with three sections is painted on the field in each "coffin corner." The closer your kick lands to the goal line, the more points you earn. A green flag marks where each successful punt lands or goes out of bounds. Use height, power, and direction to guide your punts to either corner. There is no wind to contend with at the Rookie level, but you need to consider the wind as you advance through the levels.

QB Precision Passing



This camp teaches you how to time the release and intensity of a pass so you hit a receiver at the optimal point in his route. Your goal is to throw the ball through the golden hoop when the receiver is in the proper position. You receive points for passing the ball through each hoop, and a bonus if the receiver also catches the ball.

Ground Attack



The RB Ground Attack teaches halfbacks, fullback, tight ends, and wide receivers how to use jukes, spins, stiff arms, and sprints to avoid would-be tacklers and score as many touchdowns as possible. Avoid the barriers also, because they slow you down and allow the two defenders to catch up to you. To master this drill:

- Position yourself strategically so that your blocker shields you from the first tackler
- After you get through or around the tackling dummies, run toward the far corner of the end zone. This forces the tacklers to run farther to reach you. Also, it is easier to juke and cut back against a tackler running at you from an angle.

- If you must run straight into a tackler, use the Sprint button at the point of impact to improve your chances of breaking the tackle.
- Use a stiff arm against a tackler approaching you from the side.

Catch Ball

The key to mastering this drill is to time your "route" so that you arrive at the same time as the ball. If your timing is a little off, you can leap or dive to make the catch, and earn extra points.

Chase and Tackle



In this drill your goal is to bring down the ballcarrier as quickly as possible. Use the Sprint button to close quickly, but watch out for the barriers, because the ballcarrier will use them to his advantage. You still earn points if your partner makes a tackle, but to rack up a big score, make most of the hits yourself. Above all, don't let the ballcarrier reach the end zone, or you suffer a touchdown penalty. For a nice bonus, try using the Strip button to cause a fumble.

Preseason

After sweating through Training Camp, the next step is Preseason, where you begin the long grind toward the playoffs. If you select Play Week, you go to the preseason schedule, where you get your first glimpse of the team you drafted. We'll cover preseason shortly, but for now, let's spend a little time with the Franchise Rosters screen. For now, we'll cover only the options that have relevance for preseason. Later, as we move through the schedule we will revisit other report screens as needed.

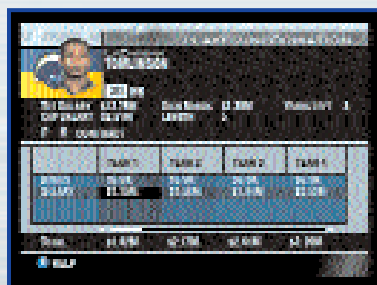
Franchise Rosters



Under the Roster heading of the Preseason screen you find several ways to view and manipulate your roster, beginning with View Roster. As pictured above, this screen lets you sort your players by one of 24 columns.



You can also view Contract, Attribute, Career, and Award screens for each player. And, you can edit Information (Name, College, Jersey #, and Right/Left), Appearance, Build, and Equipment). For details on editing and creating players see the Game Modes and Features chapter.



DEPTH CHART

This is where you make the tough decisions on whom to start at each position. Before the first game, you can only make "paper" decisions, arranging the Depth Chart according to each player's history and potential. After playing a few games, reality steps in and dictates additional changes due to poor performance, injuries, or changes in your coaching schemes. You can select Auto Reorder and let the CPU set your Depth Chart according to player attributes. However, this should be a hands-on experience. The process of arranging your Depth Chart reveals your team's strengths and weaknesses. To give you an idea of what to look for, the following lists include observations on our preseason roster.



Offense

- **Quarterback:** Obviously there is a big drop-off between Tom Brady and Ray Lucas, but that is to be expected. This might be an area we look to shore up with a trade, or in next year's college draft.
- **Halfback:** Tomlinson is the package at halfback, and since we are running primarily a single back offense, Jamel White is more than adequate to occasionally spell L.T., and he has above average speed. If we need to go three deep, Fuamatu-Ma'afala is solid, but lacks the speed of Tomlinson or White.
- **Fullback:** Dan Kreider is an above-average run blocker, but unproven as a runner and receiver. We thought about drafting Alstott for his explosiveness, but the price tag was a bit high. We might check out the free agent market if Kreider cannot provide occasional offense.
- **Wide Receivers:** We're very pleased with our quartet of Kevin Johnson, Corey Bradford, James Thrash, and Terry Glenn. Bradford and Thrash have explosive speed, but we are a little concerned about Bradford and Glenn's tendency toward getting hurt. We plan to rotate this group quite a bit, and possibly look for a free agent acquisition.
- **Tight End:** When you draft the best young tight end in the NFL, it's all good. Jeremy Shockey has it all: size, strength, speed, and catching ability. Pete Mitchell provides extra beef in the big set, and he can catch the ball.
- **Offensive Tackles:** John Tait and Marvel Smith are solid at tackle, but there is a considerable drop-off with Barrett Brooks and Jeremy McKinney. An injury would force us to make a trade or sign a free agent.

Offense cont.

– **Offensive Guards:** Edwin Mulitalo at left guard is a horse, and veteran Tony Semple is solid on the other side. Reserves are better than at tackle, with Matt Campbell and Ryan Schau.

– **Center:** Damien Woody is one of the best young centers in the NFL, with excellent pass and run blocking skills. Backup Cory Raymer is a proven performer. This is probably our deepest offensive line position.

Defense

- * **Left End:** Eric Hicks does not possess great speed, but he has excellent awareness of the field and he is equally capable of stopping the run and pressuring the quarterback.
- * **Right End:** Ndukwe Kalu had eight sacks last year and anchors the right side. We are counting on our ends to blitz frequently this year. Time will tell whether or not we need to upgrade this position.
- * **Tackles:** Cornelius Griffin and John Thornton are loads in the middle, and backup Larry Smith has solid skills.
- * **Left Outside Linebacker:** Mike Vrabel is a run-stopper who can also blitz effectively.
- * **Middle Linebacker:** London Fletcher is the quarterback on defense. He has excellent awareness of the field, and his acceleration enables him to be among the team leaders in tackles. Backup Mike Maslowski is a tireless worker who picked off three passes last year.
- * **Right Outside Linebacker:** Zeke Moreno is the heir apparent to Junior Seau's job. He is young, with great potential, but he has yet to put up big numbers. This is an important position, and Moreno will need to step up.

- * **Cornerbacks:** Dale Carter is the veteran leader in a secondary that has above average speed. Only four interceptions from Carter, Azumah, Cousin, and McBride last year, so we need to step up our performance with the controller.
- * **Free Safety:** Keion Carpenter has excellent speed, while Brent Alexander provides a solid, veteran presence.
- * **Strong Safety:** Reggie Tongue has good overall speed and strength, and above average awareness skills. Acceleration is question mark, so we will probably run deep zones.
- * **Special Teams:** We didn't select a punter or kicker until the late rounds, so this is an area of weakness. Punter Bill LaFleur is adequate, but Todd Peterson's accuracy is a question mark.
- * **Kick Returners:** Corey Bradford and James Thrash provide the blazing speed on kick-offs.
- * **Punt Returners:** James Thrash will handle the punts. He has more than enough speed and good hands.

SUBSTITUTIONS



Adjusting the Depth Chart should align most of your players properly in every formation. But, you can fine-tune each offensive and defensive set in the Substitutions screen. This a great tool lets you visualize your team as it will appear in a game. The subtleties of your players' abilities may escape you in the businesslike format of the Depth Chart, but when you see players in their positions on the field, you may be inspired to make a few changes.



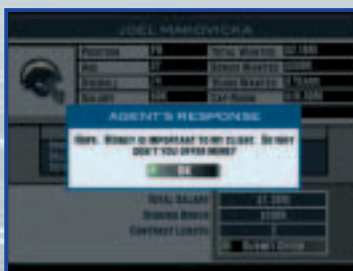
We decide to use Pete Mitchell as a run blocker in one of our two-back sets, spelling fullback Dan Kreider.

FREE AGENTS



If you finish the draft and then notice some glaring holes on your roster, the Free Agents screen may hold the

answers to your problems. But, don't get your hopes up. Remember that 32 teams passed on these players after 49 rounds. However, as we scan the list we notice Joel Makovicka, a run-blocking fullback. With only one fullback on the roster, we decide to tender an offer. Always looking for a bargain, we offer less than the \$2.18 million he is looking for.



Our first offer is rejected, so we drop down to a one-year deal with a signing bonus. Makovicka's agent accepts the deal, and we sign the fullback for one year at \$1.32 million, considerably less than the \$2.18 million/three-year contract he was looking for. We have a backup fullback, and the good news is, our salary cap cushion is still well over \$15 million. After sealing the deal, we make a quick stop at the Substitution screen to work Makovicka into a couple of sets, lightening Kreider's workload.

Note

Signing a free agent before your first season is painless. However, after the season, the process becomes much more difficult as big name players decide to test the free agent market. You need to open your wallet and compete aggressively to sign the players you covet. More on this later in the chapter.

TRADE BLOCK



It is tough enough to stock a balanced roster for your first season, so you probably will not have extra players for trades. However, you can jump in and attempt a blockbuster if you covet a particular player who eluded you in the draft. This is also a good way to find a little more cap room by dealing a player with a fat contract. You can also trade future draft picks, although we do not recommend it unless you are trying to win the Super Bowl right now.

Just for grins, we decide to offer speedy Terry Glenn (and his 5YR/\$9.05M contract), hoping to find a big, durable, possession receiver. We enter WR for our target position, and a minimum Overall Rating of 80. No takers; these owners are smart. We throw in a fifth round draft pick and resubmit the deal. Still no interest. We decide to take the offer off the table and concentrate on preseason. Other teams' needs may change dramatically when the injuries pile up.

TRADE PLAYER



The concept is the same, except this time, you make a specific trade offer to another team. When you assemble a proposed transaction, you get an immediate analysis of how the other team values their player and yours, so you get an indication of your chances. With Terry Glenn rated as an "F" and Tai Streets as a "C+", our chances aren't even on the scale. Even the addition of a third round pick did little

to inspire any interest. Sadly, we are trying to get something for nothing, so rather than add to our frustration, we back out of the trade market for now.

RELEASE PLAYER



Unless you sign a bushel of free agents after the draft, it's unlikely you'll be releasing players before the season starts. However, after playing a few games, you may make adjustments, especially to the last several spots on the roster.

Note

Before you trade or release players, review the transaction as it pertains to Salary Cap penalties. You are liable for any signing bonus money that is distributed over the length of a contract. Hence, if you trade a player who is promised \$500,000 per year over the next four years, you take a \$2,000,000 million cap penalty.

RE-SIGN PLAYER



Our last stop in the Rosters section is at the Re-Sign Player screen. This is an optional exercise where we can make contract extension offers to lock up any number of players with multi-year deals (within the limitation of our Cap Room). We recommend getting through one season before immediately signing up too many

players, but we notice that defensive end Eric Hicks is in the last year of his contract. With an Overall Rating of 86, he is a bargain at \$650,000, and he knows it. If we want to re-sign him, we need to pony up \$13.18 million over the next four years. We decide to wait, with the understanding that he might want much more if he has a great year.

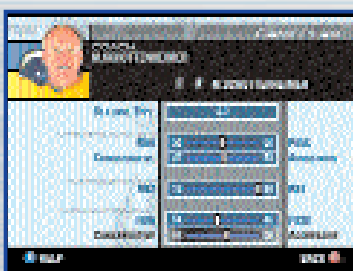
ROSTER BREAKDOWN



A final check of our roster shows 50 players, with all positions adequately filled (when a roster is missing players at any position, that position is boxed on the Roster Breakdown screen). Note there are two requirements for each position: Active Required and Required (Total).

Coach Options

GAMEPLAN



Before starting the season, it's a good idea to visit Coach Options, especially if you plan to let the CPU take over your team at any time during the schedule. On the Gameplan screen, you can select a defense type (4-3, 3-4), and set offensive and defensive strategy percentages for running and passing. You can also adjust the bar between Conservative and Aggressive play. The following sections describe the Gameplan and Management options that control how the CPU coaches and manages your team.

MANAGEMENT



Even if you are a hands-on player, you can control only one player at a time on the field. However, *Madden NFL 2004* lets you set tendencies for every position in the CPU Player Management section. First you can set the priority (how much effort the CPU puts into managing the player on the field). The default settings are fine. You can fine-tune them, but rather than set every player to maximum, it's a good idea to isolate the players who are most important to the success of your team.

Additionally, each player has a special tendency bar that relates to his position. The categories are as follows:

Quarterback:
Pocket/Scrambling

Halfback:
Power/Speed

Fullback:
Blocking/Receiving

Wide Receiver:
Speed/Possession

Tight End:
Blocking/Receiving

Tackle, Guard, & Center:
Pass Blocking/Run Blocking

Defensive End, Tackle:
Pass Rushing/Run Stopping

Linebacker:
Run Stopping/Coverage

Cornerback, Free Safety, Strong Safety:
Coverage/Hard Hitting

Kicker & Punter:
Accurate/Power

Although we think managing player contracts and the draft are the main reasons for playing in Franchise Mode, you may want a little assistance from the CPU. You can let the CPU handle any combination of player management duties (see picture above).



RATINGS



Finally, you can go to the Ratings screen to see how many Coaching Points you've accumulated. The Front Office also includes comments about your performance, so you can bask in the glory of your accomplishments (or quit before they fire you).

Note

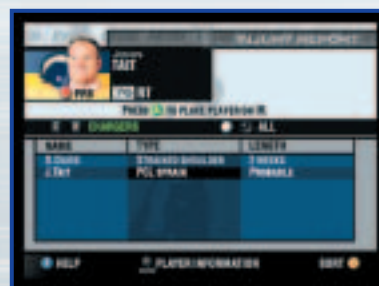
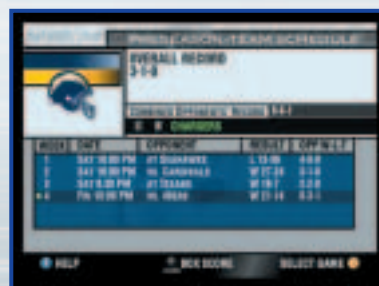
We'll preview Stat Book and League News after the season is underway and information is available.

Play Week: Preseason

Now, it's time to begin the exhibition season. We launch our inaugural season with a loss, followed by three straight victories. With the regular season ready to start, we go back to the Rosters menu and check the Injury Report. Unlike some teams that have several players on the shelf, we make it through the preseason with injuries only to reserve linebacker Don Davis, and starting tackle John Tait. Fortunately, Tait's PCL sprain is not serious and he is listed as "probable" for the season opener.

Note

If a player suffers a serious injury that sidelines him for all or most of the season, you can place him on Injured Reserve and free up a roster spot. However, once you designate a player for this list, he is unavailable for the entire season. The decision cannot be reversed.



Before advancing to the regular season schedule, we select View Progression, to check the progress of our players (and others around the league). Most players stay the same, but those who work the hardest, receive the biggest payoffs. LaDainian Tomlinson goes into the regular season with positive increases in four attribute categories. Even more impressive is the progress made by Zeke Moreno, who we're counting on at outside linebacker.



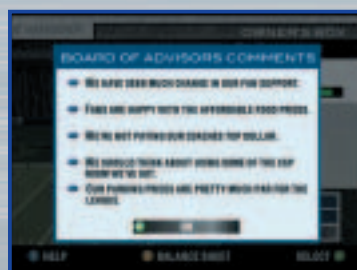
Play Week: Regular Season

We win our first four games, and then facing a winless Ravens team, we lose. One of our starting receivers, James Thrash is out for two weeks, so we look to the free agent pool for another receiver. Veteran Shawn Jefferson is available. His agent wants two years at \$1.96 million, but we offer one year at \$950,000 with a \$150,000 signing bonus. Shawn is eager for work, so his agent accepts without a second thought.

Owner's Box

With the season almost one third over, it's time to step into the Owner's Box and shuffle some papers. Our team is off to a fast start, so this might be a good time to raise a few prices.

A quick look at the Balance Sheet shows that we are \$3.65 million in the red, which is actually a dramatic improvement from the beginning of the season, when we were on the wrong side of the ledger by more than \$12 million.



Before making any financial decisions we check in with the Board of Advisors. They suggest using our Cap Room, but the team is winning, so we'd rather keep things as they are and look forward to the draft and off-season free agent market. Perhaps we'll bump the parking and concession prices just enough to offset some of the deficit.



We begin with raising ticket prices, applying most of the increases to the most expensive seats and luxury boxes. This affects only about 30 percent of the seats, so the backlash should be acceptable.



Not wanting to give the fans too much bad news at one time, we raise the Concession prices to the high end of acceptable (the Vs. Expected arrow is still green).



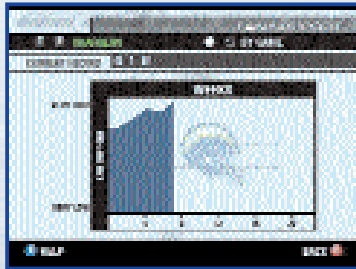
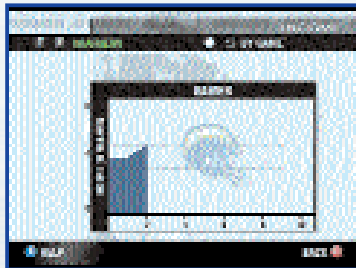
We do the same with Merchandise, boosting only the price of jerseys over the expected level.



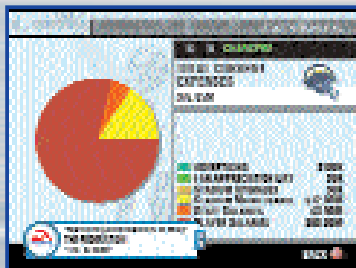
Keeping with our policy of sticking it to our wealthiest fans, we boost the Valet parking price to \$50, while keeping the other prices in the green.



After raising prices, we put a little back into Advertising, buying some billboard space for \$50,000.



After raising prices, we win the next two games, and the fans don't seem to mind that their wallets are lighter. Our Income has taken a nice jump and the team is still winning, although our advisors say that some fans are staying away because of the increased parking prices. We feel bad...not really.



TEAM	WINS	LOSSES	TIES	POINTS	POINTS PER GAME
CHARGERS	10	4	0	140	14.0
CHIEFS	9	5	0	135	13.5
COLTS	8	6	0	120	12.0
BRONCOS	7	7	0	110	11.0
RAIDERS	6	8	0	100	10.0
SEAHAWKS	5	9	0	90	9.0
GIANTS	4	10	0	80	8.0
PACKERS	3	11	0	70	7.0
49ERS	2	12	0	60	6.0
WARRIORS	1	13	0	50	5.0
VIKINGS	0	14	0	40	4.0

You find many different ways to view your financial and team data in the Owner's Box.

Stat Book

The game tracks Individual, Career, Team, Rankings, and Coach statistics for every team, player, and coach in the game. You'll want to spend hours scrolling through the pages, but for now, here are a few screens to whet your statistical appetite.

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Individual stats

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Individual defensive stats

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Career stats

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Team Offensive stats

TEAM	WINS	LOSSES	TIES	POINTS	POINTS PER GAME
CHARGERS	10	4	0	140	14.0
CHIEFS	9	5	0	135	13.5
COLTS	8	6	0	120	12.0
BRONCOS	7	7	0	110	11.0
RAIDERS	6	8	0	100	10.0
SEAHAWKS	5	9	0	90	9.0
GIANTS	4	10	0	80	8.0
PACKERS	3	11	0	70	7.0
49ERS	2	12	0	60	6.0
WARRIORS	1	13	0	50	5.0
VIKINGS	0	14	0	40	4.0

Team Rankings

League News

This section is a great place to admire your players' most memorable performances. You can view Weekly Awards, and see weekly updates to Yearly Awards and Pro Bowl team selections (after week 8). The following screens include samples of the award reports. Finally, the Horse Trailer features a Player of the Week for each week of the season.



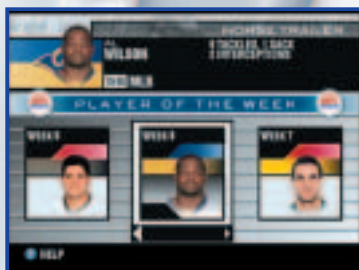
Weekly Awards

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Yearly Awards

PLAYER	TEAM	YTD	TD	INT	AVG	COMP
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0
J. HARRIS	CHARGERS	10	1	0	12.5	10.0

Pro Bowl voting

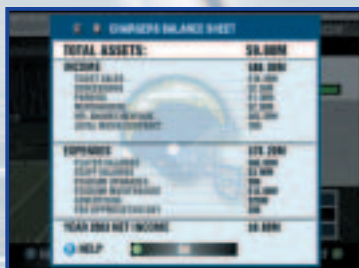


Horse Trailer

The Updates screens include weekly reports on the following:

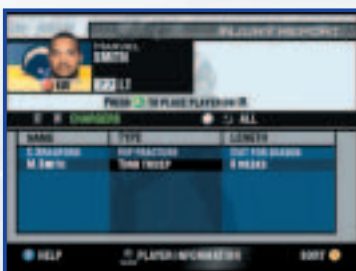
- Coach
- Signing
- Re-Signings
- Holdouts
- Releases
- Trades
- Injured Reserve
- Retirements

A Mid-Season Update

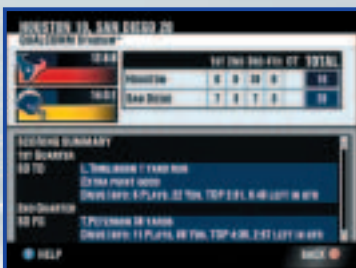


After nine games, our Chargers are sitting atop the AFC West with a 7-1-1 record. As for those controversial price increases, well, everyone loves a winner. Our \$3+ million deficit has turned into nearly \$10 million in positive cash flow. So much for our advisors!

Post Season Highlights



We finish the regular season with a record of 12-3-1, and after watching the Wild Card games, we prepare for our first playoff game against Miami. The injury report is not good. Corey Bradford is out for the season with a hip fracture, and starting offensive tackle Marvel Smith is out for the duration of the playoffs with a torn tricep. We sign a journeyman tackle to take Smith's spot, and reorder our depth chart, moving backup Barrett Robbins into the starting slot. We had already picked up Shawn Jefferson, and he has contributed positively to our playoff run. Now, if only the offensive line can hold together for a few more games.



Despite our patchwork offensive line, we survive the Division Championship Game against Miami, and advance to the Conference Championship Game, where we beat Houston 20-10. We're going to the Super Bowl!

THE SUPER BOWL



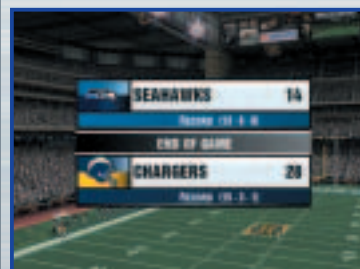
The long, hard, season comes to an exciting finale in Houston, Texas, where our Chargers take on the Seattle Seahawks in the Super Bowl. A bad case of the controller jitters leads to four and out on our first possession, and Seattle marches down the field for the first score. But, we come right back down the field to tie it on a pass from Tom Brady to Kevin Johnson.



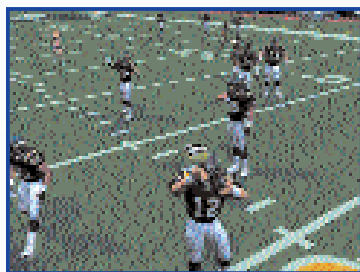
Just two plays after the kickoff, Zeke Moreno intercepts a Rich Gannon pass to give the Chargers the ball deep in Seattle territory. On the very next play, we connect again, this time Brady to Jeremy Shockey to make the score 14-7.



After Eric Hicks smotheres Rich Gannon on third and long (I should have signed him to a new contract when I had the chance), the Chargers get the ball and march right back down the field. Brady's third touchdown pass finds James Thrash in the corner of the end zone.



LaDainian Tomlinson is on the receiving end of soon-to-be-named Super Bowl MVP Tom Brady's fourth touchdown pass as the Chargers put this game away late in the fourth quarter. The Seahawks score a consolation touchdown and the game ends 28-14 as we bring a Super Bowl Championship to San Diego in our first year.

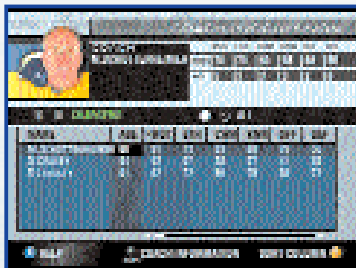


After a well-deserved celebration, we return home to San Diego to bask in the glory of an amazing year. After simulating the Pro Bowl, we have the option to import a Draft Class from *NCAA Football 2003*. If you don't have a completed college season, you can proceed to Owner Mode Off-Season.

Owner Mode Off-Season



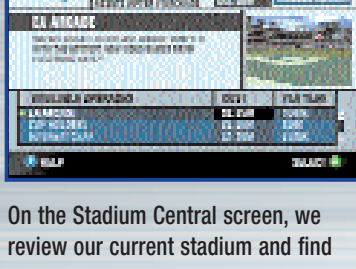
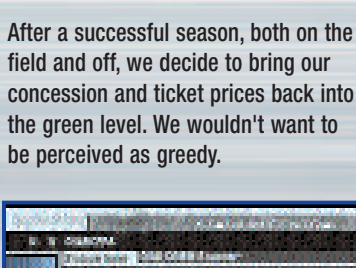
What a difference a Super Bowl championship makes! We review our season end financial statement, which shows a whopping \$47.25 million in net income.



After handling our staffing transition, we review the Coach Progression screen to see what we learned during our Super Bowl season. We improved in almost every category.



Before moving to the Off-Season menu, we review Staffing, Prices, and the Stadium. Our current Training Staff, Health Consulting, obviously did a few things right, as we survived some key injuries. However, Elite Health Co. has much more experience in the areas of Prevention and Knowledge. So, we reward Health Consulting for winning the Super Bowl by giving them their walking papers. With \$47 million lying around, we don't hesitate to pay Elite Health Co. \$2.72 million, more than double the salary of Health Consulting. Hey, it's a business, remember?



On the Stadium Central screen, we review our current stadium and find

that the old ball yard is still in good shape. A few upgrades may be in order, but we certainly aren't ready to build a new stadium. So, we opt for a new EA Arcade.

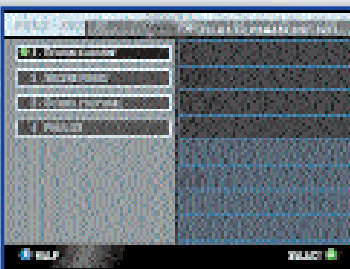
Note

Don't forget that every stadium upgrade comes with yearly maintenance fees; so don't overstress your current cash flow.



Building a new stadium takes upward of \$250 million, and at least half of the money should come from your bank account if you want to sell the city on the idea. Five or six successful years should put enough money in the coffers to put a reasonable plan on the table. Until you have the cash, don't waste our time.

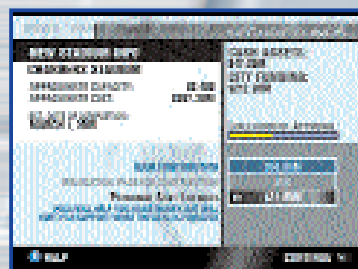
Building a Stadium



The process of building a stadium includes four parts: Design Stadium, Secure Funds, Submit Proposal, and Finalize.



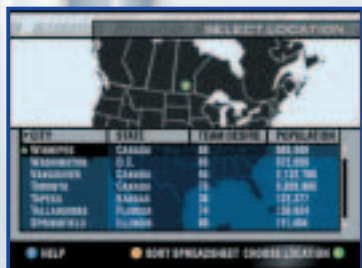
Design three decks all around the stadium, including: end zones, sidelines, and corners. You can place stairs, indent the seating, add scoreboards, and select a closed or open design. Choose lights, wall patterns, field composition, and roof style. Many of the options are cosmetic, but your choices for seating (open or closed) have a direct impact on the stadium's capacity, so keep in mind whether aesthetics are more important than ticket sales.



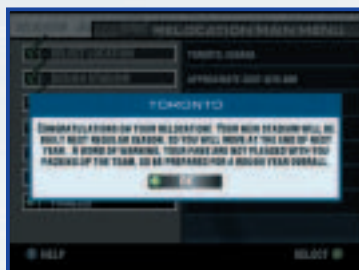
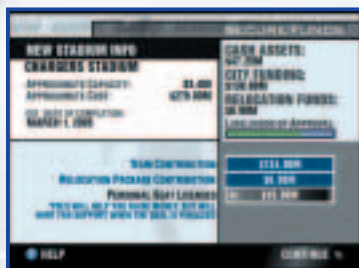
Step two is the nitty gritty of finding a substantial amount of cash to build your new stadium. The more cash you contribute as an owner, the more likely it is that the voters will endorse your plan. Watch the Likelihood of Approval bar to monitor the feasibility of your proposal (it takes almost half the money to make the bar turn green).



Step three (and the last step if you are turned down) is to submit your proposal. Unless you are prepared to pay for at least half of the cost, you can expect a refusal from the voters. Once turned down, you cannot attempt to rebuild the stadium until next year.



Building a new stadium as part of a relocation package is a little easier, but you need to receive an offer from another city. You can move on your own, but the new city will contribute far less to your efforts. During the city selection process, pay special attention to the weather (it affects the style of stadium you should build) and the per capita income (it takes disposable income to buy luxury boxes).



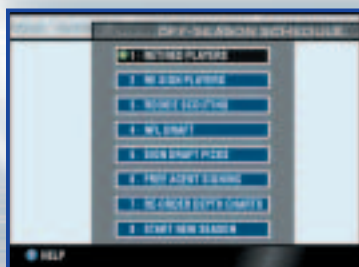
If your proposal is accepted, you receive a schedule for building the new stadium. It generally takes a year to complete, so you need to stay put as a lame duck team for one year. This is not a pleasant experience; get ready to lose a bundle as you play before sparse crowds of angry fans.

The off-season is very busy in *Madden NFL 2004*, so the schedule is very helpful. Although you do not have to follow the order of events on the way to starting a new season, if you skip one, you cannot go back and do it later. The following sections describe each step in the process.

Note

If you haven't already done so, you're prompted to fill any coaching vacancies before moving to the Off-Season menu. You can make the hire yourself, or let the CPU handle all of the vacancies.

Schedule



The off-season schedule is packed with important tasks, and you must complete each one to advance to your next season. The following sections take you through each step.

RETIRED PLAYERS



Our draft day strategy of putting together a young team pays dividends during our first off-season. Our Retired Players list contains only four players. The most notable name is cornerback Dale Carter. The good news is, he also retires a hefty contract, so we have more money to sign a top draft pick or free agent.

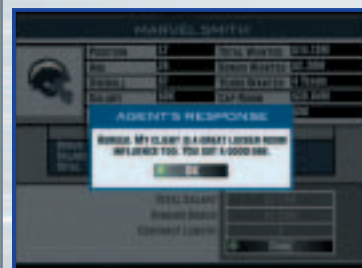
RE-SIGN PLAYERS



Unfortunately, our list of players to re-sign is long, and it includes some key players from our championship team including Pro Bowl center Damien Woody, linebackers Eric Hicks and Zeke Moreno, and offensive tackle Marvel Smith. The harsh realities of pro football tell us that we can't sign everyone and still have enough money for the draft.

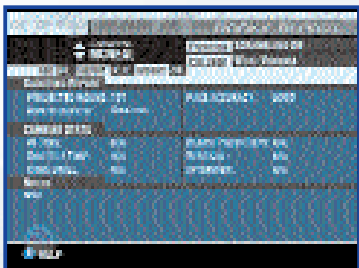
Note

If you're willing to take the time, you can save money during negotiations by starting low, and working your way up. However, your deal should be reasonable. If you make several ridiculously low offers, the player's agent may shut the door and test the free agent market. If you have to compete against other teams, the price to sign your former player will be much higher. Try shortening the length of the contract. This reduces the signing bonus payout, which affects your salary cap.



We sign Woody, Hicks, and Moreno for a combined \$24 million. It's a big chunk, so we study the remaining free agents carefully. After tough negotiations, we re-sign Keion Carpenter, a young free safety. We let the remaining 11 free agents pack their bags. After the CPU completes negotiations for the other 31 teams, we advance to Rookie Scouting.

ROOKIE SCOUTING



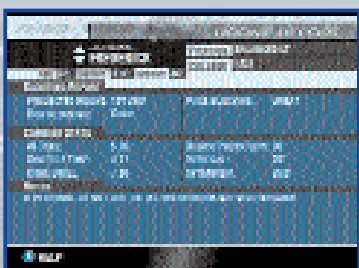
The Rookie Report is our first look at the draft pool. We can designate up to 15 players for scouting. After checking off our players, we advance to the Scouting Combine.

SCOUTING COMBINE



In the second round, the Scouting Combine, we review the class again, paying special attention to the 15 players we designated for special scouting. Each player has notes from the scouts: some are promising, while others suggest that we look elsewhere.

SCOUTING WORKOUT



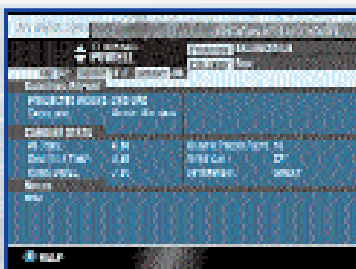
The process continues in the Scouting Workout, as the reports become more detailed and more emphatic about each player's abilities and future potential. We start to weed out the

players who are disappointing our scouts, and adding new players who seem to be excelling in the workouts.

NFL DRAFT



Before starting the draft, we check the Roster Breakdown screen to see if we have any holes on our roster. As Super Bowl Champion, we have the 32nd pick in the first round, so our options are limited. Amazingly, some of our "scouted" players are still on the board. We select cornerback William Wyatt out of N.C. State. If he lives up to the scouting reports, he should be able to fill Dale Carter's shoes and add more speed to our defensive secondary.



We draft a defensive end and defensive tackle with our next two picks. Unfortunately, that's it for our scouted players. Now, we're flying blind. We check the basic scouting information as the draft continues through seven rounds.

SIGN DRAFT PICKS

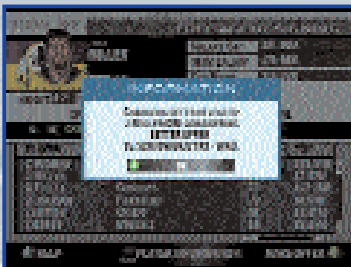


Our first round pick, cornerback William Wyatt, is the most difficult draftee to sign, but we think he has the potential to be a star in this league. As we move down the list, the deals get smaller and smaller as the talent level decreases. We finish the signing period with almost \$15 million left under the cap. We'll need every penny to sign free agents.

Note

The process of signing draft picks has a different atmosphere than signing established NFL free agents. You can afford to start low, because you have negotiating rights to the players. Also, the players usually make reasonable demands. If you guess right and lock up a future star to a multi-year deal, it's money in the bank.

FREE AGENT SIGNING



This is where we fill the remaining holes on our roster. The free agent signing period is 30 days, and it is a no-holds barred bidding war. There are no allegiances here, so be prepared to fight hard to get the players you want. After tendering offers, you can advance the period one day at a time, or any number of

days up to 30. As you move through the free agent signing period, you receive news about signings and/or rejections. If an offer is refused, you find out who else is interested in the player, and the amount of their offer.

RE-ORDER DEPTH CHART



After signing free agents to fill our roster, our last task before starting a new season is to reorder our Depth Chart. Considering our contract demands, we make it through the off-season in pretty good shape. Our Super Bowl team is largely intact; although we lost backup quarterback Chris Redman. Our replacement, Shaun King, is considerably less skilled, so we need to make sure Tom Brady stays healthy. We are excited about our #1 pick, cornerback William Wyatt. If he is a fast learner, our defensive secondary should be improved. Finally, we upgraded our offensive linemen and linebackers, two areas that were problematic last season when injuries thinned the ranks. All in all, it was a good off-season. Now, all we have to do is win back-to-back Super Bowls!

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ISBN 0-7615-4290-6



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